

## Home, Away from Home: Old Swan, James Bird and the Edmonton District, 1795–1815<sup>1</sup>

*Tolly Bradford*

**ABSTRACT.** In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Old Swan, a Siksika, was an important ally to Hudson's Bay Company trader James Bird. What is revealed here is that each man viewed the area they were in—the Edmonton District—in a different way: Bird saw the district not as a home but as a space to take resources from; Old Swan, meanwhile, saw it as a home to live in. It was these different visions of the space, I argue, that dictated how each man interacted with the fur trade and with each other. Through discourse analysis of various historical texts, this study also makes the more general point that any examination of cross-cultural interaction on the northwestern plains must take into consideration, along with economics, the cultural and intellectual motivations shaping the lives of historical actors like Old Swan and James Bird.

**SOMMAIRE.** À la fin du dix-huitième siècle et au début du dix-neuvième, Old Swan, un Indien Siksika, était un allié important de James Bird, un marchand de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson. Cet article révèle que ces deux hommes voyaient leur région-le district d'Edmonton-d'une manière différente: pour Bird, il ne s'agissait là que d'un espace d'où tirer des ressources; quant à Old Swan, il se sentait là chez lui. À mon avis, ce sont ces deux visions différentes qui dictaient les relations des deux hommes avec le commerce des fourrures ainsi qu'entre eux. En appliquant une analyse de discours à divers textes historiques, la présente étude permet de remarquer que tout examen de l'interaction transculturelle dans les plaines du nord-ouest doit prendre en considération, non seulement l'économie, mais encore les motivations culturelles et intellectuelles qui façonnaient la vie d'acteurs historiques comme Old Swan et James Bird.

*His Death may be of more than ordinary consequence in this river.*

James Bird reporting the death of Old Swan  
Fort Edmonton, October 17th 1814.<sup>2</sup>

Siksika leader Old Swan had long been an active participant in the fur/provisions trade of the North Saskatchewan River.<sup>3</sup> He, unlike the other Siksika bands further west, had chosen to pursue a policy of cooperation with European traders. That James Bird, chief trader for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in the region, recorded his death so exactly is evidence of the influence of Old Swan's policy of cooperation. While historians have looked at what the consequences of these two men were, none have looked at the space, "this river" (the North Saskatchewan), where they lived, or, more precisely, the way "this river" was perceived by these men.<sup>4</sup>

Showing that Old Swan and James Bird saw the physical landscape of the North Saskatchewan and surrounding plains differently, and that they perceived or imagined the resources and “races” of people in the space before 1815 in a different way, is an important focus of this study. What is argued here is that Old Swan saw the space of the Edmonton District as being fairly fluid in meaning and prone to change, while James Bird saw the district as a static space with two clear and separate parts, only one portion of which—the area along the North Saskatchewan River itself—he knew. Beyond showing how these two people imagined the space of the Edmonton District, I also want to suggest that it was each man’s location of “home”—more than simply material or economic considerations—that informed their imaginings. It was because the Edmonton District was “home” to Old Swan and not “home” to James Bird that the space of the district was imagined, used and lived in differently by each man.

### Why “Home”?

This examination of the Edmonton District picks up where Theodore Binnema’s study of Old Swan left off. Binnema’s narrative explained how Old Swan, as opposed to another Siksika chief, Big Man, chose a policy of cooperation and conciliation with fur traders in the Edmonton District between 1794–1814. Although Binnema’s point is well stated, and he does well to show that decisions to participate in the fur trade were being made at the individual, not the tribal, level, he remains vague on two points: what, exactly, motivated Old Swan to trade, and what, materially and culturally, were the outcomes of this trade from Old Swan’s perspective.<sup>5</sup> This chapter engages directly with these questions by arguing that Old Swan’s location of “home” was a key force shaping how he imaged the space and thus a central factor informing how and why he participated in the fur trade.

Unlike Binnema’s article, what is examined here are not Old Swan’s actions in the Edmonton District, but how he perceived or imagined the space of the district. If, as Derek Gregory argues, landscape is at the “heart of the social process,” understanding how Old Swan imagined the landscape of the Edmonton District gives us a glimpse, however slight, into Old Swan’s “social process” and world view.<sup>6</sup> Reading Old Swan’s imagination of the space tells us, for example, how he used the resources of the district, what motivated him to cooperate with the fur traders in the district, and how he may have changed his culturally constructed view of the district because of the fur trade. Driving my argument about Old Swan is the fact that, because the district was “home” to him, he was able to integrate the fur trade into his imagination of the space but not become dependent on it: thus, Old Swan constructed the district as a fluid space in which fur posts were important—but not central—elements. In taking this approach I am supporting Paul Thistle’s model of cultural change in the fur trade, and arguing that the “core” cultural values of Old Swan were not changed because of the trade: there was change for Old Swan in the contents but not the concept of the space—the space was always his “home.”<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Old Swan, James Bird, the most senior Hudson’s Bay Company trader in the Edmonton District, was not at “home” in the district. Also unlike Old Swan, Bird never saw the space as fluid. To Bird, the space was rigidly divided in two: there was the area inside the palisade walls and along the North Saskatchewan River; and there was the other world—the space beyond the palisade walls and north and south of the river. By examining Bird’s imagination of the space alongside Old Swan’s, it



becomes clear that the Edmonton District was used and perceived differently by different people and that the district did not, to say the least, represent a single “fur trade society.” This characterization of the Edmonton District as a space without a unitary “fur trade society” reflects, and follows from, what Jennifer Brown has observed about the fur trade generally. Michael Payne, in summarizing Brown’s thoughts, writes:

[Brown] suggests the existence of multiple fur trade societies [across space and time] or alternately no society at all but rather sets of social ties and exchanges that gave the fur trade a socio-cultural dimension but stop well short of any sociological definition of society.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, it is unlikely that James Bird and Old Swan saw themselves as members of the same “society.” Despite this disconnectedness, however, Old Swan and James Bird did share a common element in how they lived in the space: they each used their respective locations of “home” to inform how they imagined, and thus how they used and moved through the space of the Edmonton District. In choosing to focus on James Bird and Old Swan I am also suggesting that defining “home” was a personal experience, and that the historian of the fur trade should pay close attention to individual voices and choices. As Binnema has revealed about Siksika bands, it is inappropriate to talk of “tribes” as having a single identity or set of strategies; likewise, James Bird, I would stress, was only one person at Fort Edmonton. This present study does not explore other HBC personalities, and it should not be assumed that all HBC employees at Edmonton shared Bird’s vision of the Edmonton District.

### **Home Not Home**

The concept of “home,” writes Ilan Magat, “can help us identify the order people try to impose on experience in the course of shaping their own behaviour.”<sup>9</sup> Although Magat’s interest is the experiences of immigrants in twentieth-century Canada, his observations are useful for understanding how Old Swan and James Bird experienced the Edmonton District and how they used their “home” to impose order on, and inform their actions in, the district. Magat distinguishes between two types of “home.” First, he writes, there is “‘home’—the commonly accepted usage of the term where one resides,” then there is “‘Home’—the metaphysical usage of the word to illustrate a much larger concept.”<sup>10</sup> It is this second concept—the metaphysical Home where one belongs but might not reside—that is the more powerful of the two. This is a useful distinction; for, as I will show, although James Bird may have made his home at Fort Edmonton, his Home was not located there. Conversely, Old Swan, it is clear, saw the Edmonton District both as his home and as a portion of his Home. Thus, when I stated above that it was the location of “home” that accounted for how and why Bird and Old Swan imagined the district in a certain way, I meant—more specifically—that it was where each man located Home, not home, that informed them.

The discussion that follows is broken into three thematic areas, each addressing a different element Old Swan and James Bird had to confront in the space of the Edmonton District. These three areas are the physical and seasonal elements of the space, the resources of the space, and the “races” of people in the space.

### **The Physical Space**

In 1809 North-West Company (NWC) trader Alexander Henry (the younger)



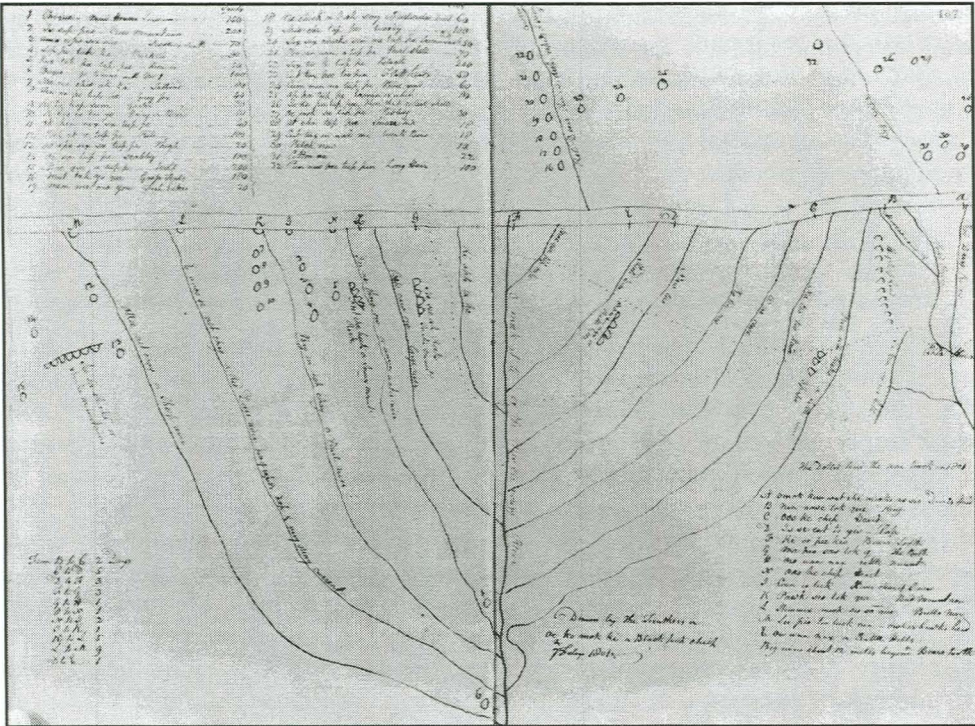


Figure 1. Old Swan's 1801 map (as transcribed by Peter Fidler). Chesterfield House is halfway up the right side of the map. The "Rocky Mountains" are represented by parallel lines running left to right near the top of the map.

Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, E.3/2 (N4348).

recorded what he deemed to be a description of Slave (or Blackfoot) space.<sup>11</sup> "The Tract of land which they call their own Country at present," wrote Henry,

commences by a due south direction from Fort Vermilion to the south branch of the Saskatchewan and up that stream to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, then in a northern direction along the mountain [sic] until it strikes upon the North branch of the Saskatchewan again and down that stream to the Vermillion River.<sup>12</sup>

Henry further specified that Old Swan's band is "the most eastward" of the Slave. This description somewhat matches how Old Swan had seen the space eight years earlier. At that time (1801) he had been trading at Chesterfield House at the east end of the South Saskatchewan River. Peter Fidler, a skilled cartographer and the Chesterfield House post-master, was well acquainted with Old Swan. In early 1801, after a 49-day excursion to the upper Missouri, Fidler had asked Old Swan to describe both his journey and the landscape it went through. Old Swan agreed to do this. And, as Old Swan described the journey, Fidler transcribed it into a map. This map is a textual representation of the space. It describes a space dominated by what were assumed to be the Rocky Mountains and the Missouri River (see Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> Because Old Swan was at Chesterfield house, and because Fidler had asked about his trip to the south, Fort Edmonton does not appear on the map. The Red Deer River is the most northerly reference point on the map.

What the map does show is that Old Swan and other Blackfoot groups were, or



reported to be, the most powerful military force on the plains north of the Missouri, and that rivers—the Missouri, the Red Deer, the South Branch—were not central to Old Swan’s definition of the space. Unlike the European maps of the time, a detailed understanding of the rivers would not have been needed for Old Swan. Binnema’s careful study of the map shows, for example, that Old Swan’s map was drawn for simplicity and usefulness, or for what Siksika people like Old Swan deemed to be useful. As a pedestrian/equestrian people the Siksika would have conceived of the space for land-based travel; the rivers would have been merely borders or lines on the large surface area of the space. The rivers were important for sources of water, but the details of the bends and flow of the rivers were not deemed relevant.<sup>14</sup> This depiction reflects Henry’s 1809 reportage. A main difference being, perhaps, that by 1809, the space known or frequented by Old Swan had shifted slightly. Although the emphasis remained on land and surface area, by 1809 Old Swan had been in the North Saskatchewan River district on and off for at least four years.<sup>15</sup> It was the “Edmonton district,” then, not the more southerly Chesterfield House that became his new position from which to launch war parties, plan buffalo pounds, and frame his idea of Home.

One gets the feeling that James Bird never ventured far beyond the valley of the North Saskatchewan River, although he did recognize that there were peoples and spaces beyond the river. Bird’s definition of the Edmonton District in 1815 explains that, at least in part, “the limits of this district are formed by the extent to which the Indians who trade here occasionally [*sic*] removed their tents in search of food or Furs...”<sup>16</sup> After this disclaimer—readable as a partial dependency on the “Indians” to describe the borders of the space—Bird gives a more concrete, fur trade-centric, description:

The District is bounded on the North by the Athapuskow River, Red Deer Lake, and the Beaver River; on the East by a line running from the Pack lake to the Missouri; and on the west to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>17</sup>

The next section of the report, entitled “Of the Rivers,” gives detailed descriptions of the main water channels, most of which Bird describes as “quite safe”—with only one having rapids, although even these were “unattended with danger.”<sup>18</sup> Unlike Old Swan, the intricacies and usefulness of the rivers were central to Bird. Juxtaposing Old Swan’s map with the HBC’s 1802 map by Arrowsmith gives a pictorial representation of Bird’s river-centric vision of the space (see Figure 2). Bird also describes the plains, the surface that I have here identified with Old Swan. Certainly Bird did know that the plains south of the river existed, but before this 1815 report he does not discuss them in any detail. In 1812, for example, having been back from York factory two weeks, Bird wrote that because the “sun is obscured with smoke” the plains must be burning. He further extrapolates that “the plains must be burnt to such an extent as to preclude all Hopes of our getting a large supply of dry provisions,” although, because he does not seem to leave the river valley, he can never say for sure.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Bird’s journals are all written either at Fort Edmonton or en route to and from York Factory. Any movement he does record occurs along the strip of waterways from York Factory to Fort Acton, and hardly ever above or below this river-based line.<sup>20</sup> For information about the burning plains in 1814, for example, he relies on “a band of blood Indians...”<sup>21</sup> And in 1811, even with starvation apparently threatening the fort, he declares that a four-







day journey is “too great [a distance] to be able to fetch meat...”<sup>22</sup> He was at home in the fort, but not at Home in the space of the plains.

Although the river dominated Bird’s space while the plains was the focus of Old Swan’s space, both men did to some extent agree on the role of the Rocky Mountains within the district. Bird had a love-hate relationship with the mountains. Pushing to the western extent of the Saskatchewan River in 1799 he wrote, “nothing can be seen but the gloomy tops of pines till the Rocky Mountain [*sic*] (whose icy summits seem to pierce the sky) intercepts the view.”<sup>23</sup> Bird offsets this view of the mountains with what he describes as the “fairly agreeable plains below.”<sup>24</sup> Leading up to 1815, Bird’s opinion of the Rockies as something aesthetically interesting though not very “agreeable,” changes little. In 1808 he describes crossing the mountains to trade as “impossible.”<sup>25</sup> In 1811, due to rising tension between Salish and Blackfoot groups, he sees a traverse as “too dangerous,”<sup>26</sup> and in 1813 he thinks lucrative trade via the mountains to be “extremely improbable.”<sup>27</sup> By 1814 he clarifies these beliefs, saying that because the “road ... across the mountains is long and extremely bad” because there is a “scarcity of Food...” to supply such a journey, and because, even if successfully crossed, the “beavers are not numerous nor the Indians industrious,” such an endeavour would be of little point.<sup>28</sup> These imaginations or constructions of the Rocky Mountains were based on Bird’s position as a trader, not his position as a person at Home in the space or at Home in the mountains. To James Bird, the mountains were a physical obstacle that slowed the HBC’s trading plans. David Thompson of the NWC and Bird’s own man Joseph Howse had crossed the mountains by 1810, yet in Bird’s mind the mountains still represented a barrier to economically viable trade. By 1815, thus, Bird was happy to recognize the mountains as an important aesthetic component of his space, as “one of the grandest prospects in Nature” even, but he remained sceptical of the possibility of cross-mountain trade.<sup>29</sup>

To Old Swan the mountains were also a kind of border in his space, though not, perhaps, the barrier Bird saw. A careful examination of Old Swan’s 1801 map reveals that what Fidler labelled the “Rocky Mountains” were actually what Old Swan would have called the *mistakis*, the foothills or the front range of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>30</sup> Old Swan’s inclusion of the *mistakis* in his map was not simply for aesthetic reasons but because, to him and to his band members from their vantage point on the plains, these foothills were points of reference. Binnema is again invaluable on this. His analysis reveals that the specific “mountains” on the map were not necessarily the highest peaks, but rather those most distinguishable from the plains—those that, because of their shape or position, could be seen from the plains and used as reference points for Blackfoot heading west.<sup>31</sup> More correctly, then, the mountains and foothills were signposts—not obstacles to cross over. Because the space was Home to Old Swan, the mountains had a different meaning and played a clearly different role than they did for Bird.

The other thing Old Swan’s 1801 map reveals, and that the Fort Edmonton journals support, is that Old Swan, and certainly the members of other Blackfoot groups, saw the Mountains not as a barrier for their movement west, but as a way to stop Kootenay and Salish from coming east—a positive barrier to the trade James Bird was trying to pursue. The mountains were beneficial to the Siksika because, with Bird’s apparent apathy about crossing the mountains, the Kootenay and Salish would not have direct access to trade goods. The mountains, in this

sense, helped maintain Blackfoot dominance over the trade on the east side of the mountains, and thus helped protect Old Swan's Home on the plains.

### **Seasoned Space**

An important variable contributing to how each man imagined the space of the Edmonton District was seasonal change. In the fall, Bird would arrive back from York Factory, evaluate the situation of provisions, do some small trading, and prepare for the winter ahead. Old Swan's movements in the fall are more difficult to track. Reports from Chesterfield House and Fort Vermillion suggest that Old Swan was often around the posts throughout the fall; he was probably among those waiting for Fidler to arrive in September 1801, for example.<sup>32</sup> In the late fall Old Swan either set up a buffalo pound or set off on a war expedition to the west. This seasonal pattern of movement suggests that Old Swan was to some extent continuing what had been done for years by Blackfoot groups: using the high concentration of buffalo found on the plains in the late fall and early winter to set up pounds for mass harvesting during December.

Bird was indirectly dependent on this harvesting of buffalo. By December, Edmonton House needed to acquire buffalo meat either through trade or hunting; and during a difficult winter Bird became more dependent than usual on these outside provisions. The years 1811, 1812, 1813, 1814 were all difficult for Bird. Because of the "extreme severity of the winter & [the] extraordinary Depth off [*sic*] snow" in 1811, hunting, especially if using horses, was nearly impossible.<sup>33</sup> In 1814, the problems of procuring provisions continued: "The Plains for sixty Miles round this place were entirely ravaged by Fires last fall [i.e., 1813] and the consequence has been that we have neither seen an Indian from that quarter nor heard of a Buffalo since that Time."<sup>34</sup> Between fire, snow and cold, Bird's life and the way he lived in the space were shaped by what the seasons brought him in weather, and by his dependency on provisions from Native groups around him. The other seasonal pattern he had to respond to was that of doing business within the large system of the HBC. By mid-May, after surviving these winters and doing some spring trading, Bird would begin his trip out to York Factory. Reaching York Factory in July or August, he would stay at the bay-side post for up to two weeks before returning to Edmonton to start the cycle again.

In these spring and summer months, Old Swan's movements are nearly impossible to pin down. Drawing on Alexander Henry's report that "in the summer, they [Old Swan's band] chase the Buffalo on horse back and kill them with bow and arrow," we might assume that a certain continuity with pre-contact Blackfoot society was maintained and that the summer buffalo hunt was still important to the space. The other major activity Old Swan probably undertook in the summer, and one again reflecting how he imagined the space of the northern plains as his Home, was warfare. In the fall of 1807 and 1808 Henry and Bird both report that Blackfoot and Cree had been at war over the summer, although Old Swan himself may not have been directly involved in these incidents.<sup>35</sup> Throughout seasonal changes, therefore, Old Swan's Home continued to be located on the plains. Conversely, locating a long-term, trans-seasonal Home for James Bird is a difficult task for the historian.

### **Resource Space**

While we cannot know how Old Swan dealt with the prairie fires of 1812 to



1814, we know that Bird was constantly complaining about the “scarcity” of buffalo during these years.<sup>36</sup> Bird, of course, was being pressured to supply not only his own community at Fort Edmonton but also the outlying areas of Swan River and Acton House.<sup>37</sup> Bird viewed the buffalo as a resource not needed just by the local Fort Edmonton population, but also by a wider group of people. Likewise, Bird viewed the trees of the district as a resource needed by the HBC. Trees were needed to build boats, to construct the posts and the palisades, and to supply the fort with firewood. By 1815, Bird happily declared that “trees ... grow in favourable situations to a size sufficiently large for any purpose they can be requested,” and that the area around the fort could “afford subsistence to a much greater number of inhabitants” than were presently at the fort.<sup>38</sup> And, despite his apparent difficulty in the winters of between 1812 and 1814, by 1815 he believed that “large quantities of Meat and Fish [could] be procured in all seasons and the ground [could] yield abundantly Barley, Potatoes, Turnips, Cabbages and all other hardy vegetables.”<sup>39</sup> This 1815 report, of course, was written to the HBC committee and Bird was necessarily putting a positive spin on the district and his role in it. However, there also seems to be another story evolving here. If Bird, from his initial time of entry into the Edmonton District, had seen the river not as a Home but as a space to build the HBC trade from, then by 1815 his comments about the plentiful resources may be a continuation and an amplification of this theme: Bird was becoming more willing to procure and exploit the resources of the surrounding environment in order to benefit the HBC. The 1815 report about the plentiful resources of the region and the ability of the region to support “almost any number of men” suggests that Bird and/or the HBC officials in London were coming to see Edmonton as more than just an isolated post to be visited and to trade through.<sup>40</sup> Edmonton seemed to be becoming a more fixed and sedentary idea, a fort that would have a life after the trade was over as well as a space where the environment could be controlled and used and re-shaped for these interests. As of 1815, however, Edmonton was still not Home to either James Bird or the HBC.

While Bird saw the natural resources of the space as useful, Old Swan was concerned with how these things—the buffalo especially—could allow him access other resources: namely, how the buffalo could be used to acquire the manufactured goods Bird was bringing into the space from England. When Old Swan and his band started trading at Chesterfield House in 1800, they seemed to be vying to become the home-band of Chesterfield. Although Chesterfield House was abandoned in 1802, Old Swan’s actions clearly show his interest in adding the fur trade post to his ideal image of the space as Home. Peter Fidler, the senior HBC official at Chesterfield, was cognizant of the need to maintain Old Swan’s support. He, like the NWC six years previously, had a coat (a uniform) made for Old Swan; this coat was a symbol of Fidler’s and the HBC’s, and perhaps even the British Empire’s, interest in and respect for Old Swan as an important trading ally. But this gift had not come without Old Swan’s persistent help to Chesterfield House, and to Fidler in particular. The 1801 map mentioned earlier would have been part of this exchange of things beyond simply furs and buffalo. Blackfoot guides provided by Old Swan were also vital to Fidler’s success at this isolated post.<sup>41</sup> Old Swan and other Blackfoot groups were not only part of the trade at the post, but were vital actors in the operation of the post—an interesting observation when placed alongside the lesser role of the Gros Ventre and the violence they instigated before the

post's closure in 1802.<sup>42</sup> Old Swan, then, seemed to have made a conscious decision not only to allow the post to be constructed, but also to encourage his Siksika band members to trap, to hunt and to work with the HBC officials in operating the post.

With Old Swan's help, Chesterfield House was able to accumulate an impressive 12,000 Made Beaver (MB) in 1801, compared to Edmonton's 2,087 MB.<sup>43</sup> The exact reason for this kind of enthusiasm on the part of the Siksika at Chesterfield is unclear, although much of the existing fur trade historiography has tended to place a primacy on economic motivations when describing the actions of Aboriginal traders.<sup>44</sup> While not ignoring this historiographic trend, I want to add the dimension of Home to these economic analyses by arguing that Old Swan's location of Home informed the way he dealt with the European traders and the goods they introduced to the district. Old Swan, to be sure, needed to maintain access to trade in order to keep guns coming to him. It was guns, as Arthur Ray has shown in his study of the trade further to the east, which often separated trading and non-trading groups.<sup>45</sup> Without guns military pursuits were weakened, and groups like the Salish and Kootenay would threaten Blackfoot dominance on the plains.

Beyond guns, there were the other so-called "necessities" Old Swan and his band saw as resources: especially, although not exclusively, alcohol and tobacco.<sup>46</sup> On the second day back at Chesterfield House in the fall of 1801, Fidler exclaimed that "upwards of forty men came here in the night for tobacco," Blackfoot among them.<sup>47</sup> In the same year Fidler points out the need to keep well-stocked supplies of Brazilian tobacco but not the carrot tobacco, which "the Indians will not trade."<sup>48</sup> Not only did the Blackfoot want tobacco, but—much like the HBC's own interest in specific kinds of furs and resources—they would only trade for a specific type of tobacco. Of alcohol, Fidler notes that in November "Two blackfeet came in with a few furs which they trade[ed] only for liquor."<sup>49</sup> As Old Swan himself, trading in 1807, explained to James Bird, "his countrymen ... [have] been long accustomed to be[ing] supplied with Brandy, tobacco &c. These article are become objects of primary necessity to them."<sup>50</sup> As with guns and blankets, these materials seem to have been integrated into the Siksika definition of Home.

Old Swan's band, then, had a mixture of resources in mind when they traded, but what of Old Swan personally, and of the "Chiefs coats and other things" which Fidler "rigged" him with in the spring of 1802? The sources suggest that this incentive did not hurt relations between the HBC and Old Swan.<sup>51</sup> These gifts may have been viewed, from the perspective of the HBC, not only as a thank-you gift to a "friendly Indian," but also as a way to inscribe an identity on Old Swan which privileged Europeanized materials and fashions, thus trying to bring him under the cultural (as well as economic) sphere of the trading company. To Old Swan this coat was probably less culturally intrusive than Fidler might have hoped, and was more likely a way to further his own status within his community and Home. More to the point, the presentation of the coat was Fidler's way of inviting the Siksika to follow him back to the North Saskatchewan as well as a way to maintain a trading relationship between the HBC and Old Swan's band.

### **Race Space (?)**

I do not want to ignore the fact that the space of the Edmonton District was Home or home for many different people: there were men and women in the



space, each with their own experience and relationship to it. In the language of today, the Edmonton District and its immediate vicinity were actually fairly cosmopolitan spaces. That said, my focus now is on how Old Swan and James Bird imagined men in the space, and specifically how they each perceived men who were from outside their own communities: how Old Swan saw the “white men” in the space, for instance, and how James Bird saw the “Indian” men in the space. Again, it is clear that each man’s location of Home dictated his ideas of “outsiders.” While Bird saw people outside the fort walls as inherently different from himself—as not part of his Home—Old Swan integrated the different people in the district to construct a vision of the space in which various “races” overlapped and interacted. Old Swan imagined his Home, in fact, as multi-racial.

In his 1815 report James Bird explains that while “the disadvantage with regard to trade [in the south-west of the district] are the indolence and independent and cruel treacherous disposition of great part of the inhabitants,” many of the bands in the immediate vicinity of Fort Edmonton are “independent and alive to their own interests” regarding the trade.<sup>52</sup> By 1815, then, Bird sees the populations outside the fort walls as different from himself, yet he also sees a complex network of Native societies, and he recognizes differences between distinct bands and “tribes.” This recognition of differences between Aboriginal peoples was based on how Bird regarded each group’s, or each individual’s, proficiency to trade. Those who were most helpful to the fort and to Bird’s aims were “friendly,” those who were not helpful were “indolent” or “useless.” These categorizations, then, were not biological-based racial categories but linked rather to the apparent economic usefulness of a particular “Indian” or band.

In 1813 Bird recorded that “an Indian arrived at our Neighbours who informed me that one of our very best Indians is so ill that his life is despaired of.”<sup>53</sup> About two weeks later this “very best Indian,” or “our very best Indian” as Bird had called him, died. Bird’s entry of the death is again marked with his preoccupation of its economic impact, lamenting: “This is the second very good Trader we have lost since July.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise, upon the death of Old Swan, who had long been an important trader, Bird acknowledged: “This Chief was imminently instrumental in preserving peace...[and] was also the firm friend of the white Men.”<sup>55</sup> These two “very best” or “firm friends” were “Indians” that Bird saw as helpful and useful to the trade, and as they are the only “Indians” so described by Bird, their stories are the exception in Bird’s journal up to 1815.

Equally as scarce in Bird’s journal are statements that describe Aboriginal people as “indolent” or as being “useless and ... troublesome”<sup>56</sup>; these kinds of observations, like those of “friendly Indians,” are few in Bird’s journal. Of the overwhelming majority of Aboriginal people who come to trade, Bird passes few editorial comments, simply saying, for example, “Three Muddy River Indians arrived who brought a few beavers,”<sup>57</sup> or, most commonly, “The Indians of yesterday traded and went away.” In fact, even when there was alcohol-related violence in the camps near the fort, Bird does not seem to invoke racial stereotyping or racial discourse. On January 3, 1811, for example, Bird writes:

A woman arrived from the crees of yesterday and informed us that a quarrel had taken place amongst them last night which terminated in the Death of one man, and another man receiving two stabs in the back.<sup>58</sup>

Yet Bird leaves no qualifying statement. Of a similar incident in 1814, Bird writes: "An Indian woman arrived... She informed me that a quarrel had taken place among the Indians in consequence of which two Men are killed..." Explaining that this incident accounted for the sixth and seventh such deaths in the past year, Bird only editorializes the incident in reference to its impact on the trade: the dead men, he explains, were "unfortunately, our traders."<sup>59</sup>

The question of whether Bird's imagination of the space was "racialized" is complex. He did recognize that in the space of the Edmonton District there were "White men" and there were "Indians," and that it was the latter that posed not only an opportunity but also a threat to the trader.<sup>60</sup> We see this image of the "Indian" as a threat in the October 19, 1808 entry where Bird reports that the Stoney Indians have "long secretly determined on the kind of revenge ... [where] all white men were equally satisfactory Object for their Vengeance..."<sup>61</sup> Likewise the April 11, 1813 entry explains that the men of the fort must "endeavour to get up the Stockades Before the Indians arrive," fearing, one supposes, an invasion into the "white man's" home-space of the fort.<sup>62</sup> Although there is certainly an element of "race" here—that the space was divided into (at least) two "races"—this is not the discourse of the later-nineteenth century. That there is the absence of this later discourse is perhaps because the operation of the fort, especially during the winters of 1811–14, was too dependent on these "others" to allow for knowledge to be manufactured about them.<sup>63</sup> Since Bird did not hold real power and knowledge in the space, using racial discourse from the metropolitan centre would have to wait. Also, so long as Bird was in the space only to trade, not to create a sense of Home, it follows that besides discussing how people like Old Swan participated, or disrupted, the HBC's commerce, Bird would have had no need to racialize and categorize the inhabitants of this space.

Old Swan, however, was at Home in the space and seemed to deal with "race" slightly differently. For him, of course, there were several other people besides the "white man" to imagine or work with inside this space. There were the members of his own band, those of the Cree and Assiniboine bands around Fort Edmonton, as well as members of the Salish bands to the west. Each group, and each person within each group, would have presented a considerable challenge to the way Old Swan perceived the space and constructed his Home. In essence, he wanted to negotiate between these people and between their competing interests. He wanted to maintain access to trade and access to the buffalo, and also respond to the needs and ideas of his own band members. Chief among these needs would have been his band's interest in having a well-defined Home.

His time with Peter Fidler—making maps, getting coats, acquiring tobacco—gives insight into why Old Swan wanted to trade; but understanding how he viewed the person or people providing these trading goods is more difficult to grasp. In the most straightforward terms, he probably approached the white man like most Native traders did: having "very little attachment to a particular house" and choosing the "House where the greatest value is set on the commodity [he] may have..."<sup>64</sup> This pragmatism suggests that Old Swan would have seen the white man as an economic partner and explains why, according to Alexander Henry, Old Swan believed that without "white people" the Blackfoot would be "pitiful indeed."<sup>65</sup>

Henry's account of his visit to a Siksika buffalo pound in 1809 gives us further insight into how Old Swan viewed the "white people." Writing five days before



Christmas, Henry explains how “The Black feet have repeatedly sent for ... me to go to their Camp which [is] near at hand [to] see the Buffalo enter the pound.”<sup>66</sup> This visit lasted three days. During the visit, Henry and his men were treated to food and tent space; they were encouraged, in a way, to come into Old Swan’s “fort” and be integrated into *his* definition of the river valley as a fluid space. Henry also observed that, although

they [the Siksika] were very civil and kind to us ... like all Indian tribes, their principal object was to get what they could from us, and once they perceived there is nothing more which they can expect to get ... they then become careless about us.<sup>67</sup>

Old Swan ultimately saw Henry and his men as trading allies, not as members of a different “race.”

In a long passage of ethnographic information apparently given by Old Swan to Henry in 1809, another clue about Old Swan’s perception of the “white man” is revealed. In this passage we see Old Swan apparently comparing a Creator-like figure to the/a “white man”:

He [Old Swan] says at first the world was one large Body of Water, inhabited by only one Great White man and his Wife but they had no children. This man in the course of time made the earth, divided the water into Great Lakes and Rivers and formed the great range of Rocky Mountains after which he made all the Beasts, Birds and Fish and every other living creature.<sup>68</sup>

Reading the layers of transmission here is crucial. The question of who in fact said/wrote “Great White man” is not clear: was it Alexander Henry (who had apparently recorded the story)? Or was it Old Swan? Or was it, perhaps, the publisher of Henry’s journal?<sup>69</sup> We know that in contemporary oral tellings of this story the Old Man figure is not connected to a “white man”—“great” or otherwise. It is true that Blackfoot in the mid-eighteenth century had associated the “white man” with *Napi*, or *Napikwan*, which means “old Man person,” but, according to one historian, this association had fallen out of use by Old Swan’s time.<sup>70</sup> If this is true, why does Henry’s journal record Old Swan referencing “one Great White man” as a creator-like figure?

It must be stressed that the authorship of this creation story is hard to pin down. If we assume, however, that Old Swan did in fact tell Henry that initially the world was “inhabited by only one great White man” we should question his motives. Perhaps Old Swan was consciously recasting or redeploying the idea that *white people—those men inside the post—hold power over special resources*.<sup>71</sup> Put another way, because Old Swan recognized that the “white men” were an important element in the space around him, he may have taken one of “his own” myths and reworked it to suit the realities of this new context: he may have reformulated the creation story for a new set of white ears—ears that would probably appreciate seeing the “white race” in the position of “creator.” Later in Old Swan’s telling (or Henry’s writing) of the story, this “one Great White man” goes on to make

a man out of clay ... [and] a wife ... [who] in course of time had a [*sic*] numerous offspring that again intermarried and from them originated all the White men. The Indians were made afterwards, by the Great White man, and out of the same material as he had made the first.<sup>72</sup>

The existence of “race” seems to be understood by Old Swan here, and is hence woven into the story. But, as suggested above, Old Swan was probably not responding to the Eurocentric discourse of “race” or “racialization” that was to pervade the later-nineteenth century. One historian of the British Empire, C.A. Bayly, has suggested that it wasn’t until the 1820s that the British Empire had a clear vision of how to “invent” (or construct a discourse about) the indigenous populations of the realm.<sup>73</sup> The above discussion of James Bird’s imagination of the “Indians” at Edmonton supports Bayly’s theory. Certainly, it seems that any racial discourse being manufactured by Bird probably meant little to Old Swan: “race,” to Old Swan, was linked to material culture, nothing more.

The two passages from the creation story quoted above can be read in a number of ways. I, referring back to earlier observations, see Old Swan’s decision to re-construct the creation myth as a way to appease the white ears of Henry. This action is suggestive of Old Swan’s vision of this space as fluid and as Home: it was a space where “old myths” about the meaning of Home could even be re-oralized to include a role for the new “race” of men inside the space. As the contents of the space changed for Old Swan, so to, it seems here, did the contents of his Home. Alternatively, the way this creation story was told may have been nothing more than a bit of jovial leg-pulling by Old Swan—a laugh at Henry’s (earnest) expense.

### Going Home

Old Swan died sometime before October 17, 1814.<sup>74</sup> According to his testimony to Henry, his “spirit [would have] instantly [gone] to a great Hummock of Wood that is situated between the Red Deer River and the South branch of the Saskatchewan within sight of the Rocky Mountains.”<sup>75</sup> That this afterlife “location” was set within the space of the district is significant: the space, the surface of the northwestern plains, was part of his Home even in death. It was in this space that he had grown-up; had hunted buffalo in both pounds and from horseback; had gone to war with, and—in the river valley area—made peace with the Cree; had participated in the trade with Europeans; had invited the “white men” operating this trade to his pound; had become “accustomed” to the “necessities” provided by their trade; and had continued using the resources of the plains to both live and get the materials of this trade. Because this space was his Home he was able to imagine and re-imagine this space; he was able to allow for the overlapping of these activities and the changes and continuities they wrought. He was also able to—and had to—shape his own vision of how he could use this trade system and this space in the best way possible to make and re-make his Home.

James Bird, on the other hand, died a “pretentious and insensitive” man in the Red River Colony over ten years later. He ended his time as chief factor at Edmonton in 1816, although he was still employed by the HBC until his death. Bird was never at Home in Fort Edmonton; he had always been there as a trader and an employee, not as a settler. And, although he travelled to England in 1822-23, even this trip was probably not the “leave home” that John Foster describes it as.<sup>76</sup>

Unlike Old Swan, locating Bird’s Home is difficult. He had left England at age fifteen and had lived and worked all of his adult life in Rupert’s Land making no visits east of York Factory until he was 49.<sup>77</sup> He did, however, in 1815 still list his home parish as Acton (unlike, for example, his sons who were from the parish of “Hudson Bay”).<sup>78</sup> And Bird did keep fragments of Britishness with him at the fort.



In 1795 he obtained a violin from England, and by 1799 he had in his library the 21-volume *Ancient Universal History* among his books.<sup>79</sup> An 1801 letter to Bird explained that “The Honourable Company” had given him “permission to send [his] son to England,” although Bird does not seem to have followed through with this plan.<sup>80</sup> Although it is possible, then, that England was once Home for Bird, by 1822, after 34 years away from it, his “leave home” was probably very jarring, and probably not very “Home-like” at all. Bird seems to have been an early victim of the global world; his was a life that exemplified what Homi Bhabha has called the “‘unhomeliness’ inherent in ... cross-cultural initiation.”<sup>81</sup>

The HBC committee, and their rules and ideas of status, were his strongest, most concrete tie to England, although even these were flexible due to geographic distance. At least twice during his time at Edmonton Bird recognizes the need to bend the rules on the valuation of furs, explaining that he would “follow [the valuation] as far as Prudence will permit.”<sup>82</sup> This flexibility of the frontier, yet attachment to London, was an important tension shaping Bird’s imagination of the space around him at Edmonton.<sup>83</sup> Bird may have seen Fort Edmonton as attached to London, but also as a place over which he had some autonomous control. Because his entire journal, especially after 1811, clearly shows his deferential treatment towards the readers—the committee in London—we have trouble seeing/hearing what James Bird the person, as opposed to James Bird the status-conscious HBC employee, thought about the Edmonton District. Bird’s journal was in fact a kind of performance for London, drawing on the reality of Fort Edmonton for its material.

An examination of Bird’s life and career, then, reveals that Bird was “unHomely”: the Edmonton District, and the river Bird seemed to pin himself to, was not Home, though neither was Britain. He was in Edmonton to trade, to take resources from the space. He was not at Edmonton to, like Old Swan, integrate together the different elements of the space or to find a new, fluid, Home-like definition of it. If Bird had any identifiable Home it was the “Honourable Company,” the HBC itself; if this was the case, Bird, unlike Old Swan, lived in a Home tied to a set of rules and expectations—not to a space. Because Old Swan and Bird had such dissimilar Homes, it is little wonder that they each imagined and used the space of Edmonton and the plains differently.

### Home

More than simply pointing to the economic and material motivations involved in the fur trade at Edmonton, this study has argued that it was where James Bird and Old Swan located Home that informed how they used the Edmonton District and how they saw their role in the space of the district. Much of the historiography about the fur trade has tended to place a primacy on economic factors alone to explain why Aboriginal people traded, and how HBC officials acted. This study has added nuance to this trend. Because Old Swan was at Home in the district it was a logical decision for him to trade and to integrate the new materials and people of the trading posts into his definition of Home; for Old Swan, at least, the trade at Edmonton was a boon to his Home. Likewise, James Bird, not at Home in the space of the Edmonton District, organized his actions in the space to benefit his Home—the HBC—and his own position in this Home. Constructing the story of James Bird and Old Swan at Edmonton around the theme of Home has revealed, therefore, the context in which each man made economic decisions.

This study also suggests something else: the power to define the space of the Edmonton District did not—at this point in history—rest with James Bird and the HBC. At least before 1815, to James Bird the Edmonton District was always just a space to do business in by taking resources from it. To Old Swan, however, the district was place, a Home into which resources from industrial Britain could easily be integrated with the resources from the fall buffalo hunt. It is worth questioning, of course, what happened to Home at the end of the nineteenth century after the “Great Transformation” of Western Canada.<sup>84</sup> Where was Home for Siksika people and HBC officials in 1880? How had the construction of the reserve system changed the definition of Home for all people living on the plains? Had Home—and a changing definition of it—informed the way treaties were negotiated and reserves established? Western Canadian historiography has often relied on economic analyses to describe this “transformation” and to describe the fur trade era before it; investigating the role of Home is a way to write a history that, although cognizant of economic factors, stresses the intellectual and cultural forces in this history and in the history of cross-cultural interaction generally. Thus, Home is a basic feature organizing human actions that is deserving of considerable historical inquiry.

## Notes

1. For valuable feedback on early drafts of this paper I'd like to thank Gerhard Ens, Michael Payne, Ted Binnema, and my fellow students from the Fort Edmonton seminar at the University of Alberta, Fall 2002. Portions of this paper were presented at, and appear in the proceedings of, the Culture and State conference, University of Alberta, May 2003.
2. Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, B.60/a/13, October 17, 1814.
3. In my own text I use labels Aboriginal peoples self-identify with, such as “Siksika.” When quoting primary sources, however, I have kept the original terminology used by James Bird and other Europeans; Bird, for example, labels “Siksika” people as “Blackfoot” or “Blackfeet.” During the 1794–1814 period Old Swan traded at a number of Forts. He mostly traded in and around the North Saskatchewan except between 1800 and 1802 when he based his trade at Chesterfield House on the South Saskatchewan just inside present day Saskatchewan.
4. For a study of Old Swan see Theodore Binnema, “Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands, 1794–1815,” *Canadian Historical Review* 77 (1996): 1–32. For a biography of James Bird see John Foster, “James Bird, Fur Trader,” in Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa (eds.), *Edmonton: The Life of a City* (Edmonton: New West Publishers, 1995), 12–20.
5. On the questions of motivation for Old Swan's participation in the trade, Binnema suggests only that the decision to trade was motivated by the “complex reality in which individual and communal choice were made.” Of the outcomes of this trade, Binnema suggests: “direct trade ... had more than economic consequences, for it allowed the Blackfoot to reconsider a whole array of established relationships and behaviours.” See Binnema, “Old Swan, Big Man and Siksika Bands,” 32 and 11.
6. Derek Gregory, *Geographic Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell), 145. For an example of how spatial analysis has already been thought about in the context of the fur trade see Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660–1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), and Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure: An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 257. More recently, James Carson has argued that Ray's spatial analysis of the fur trade, although sophisticated, is too economic in nature. Carson argues that a spatial analysis of an event like the fur trade must see land as being a “physical” as well as a “moral place.” See James Carson, “Ethnography and the Native American Past,” *Ethnohistory* 4 (2002): 769–88.
7. Paul Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1986), 34–35.
8. Michael Payne, “Fur Trade Historiography: Past Conditions, Present Circumstances and a Hint of Future Prospects,” in Theodore Binnema, Gerhard Ens and R.C. Macleod (eds.), *From Rupert's Land to Canada* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2001), 9. See also Jennifer Brown, “The Blind Men and



- the Elephant: Fur Trade History Revisited," in Patricia A. McCormack and R. Geoffrey (eds.), *The Uncovered Past: Roots of Northern Alberta Societies* (Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute, University of Alberta, 1993).
9. Ilan Natan Magat, "Home As the Meeting of Heaven and Earth" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1995), 2. Thanks to Tosha Tsang for her ideas on "Home" and for drawing my attention to this source.
  10. Magat, "Home As the Meeting of Heaven and Earth," 6.
  11. Slave also means Blackfoot Confederacy or the combined "nation" of the Piegan, Siksika and Kainai Indians. There was, as several historians have pointed out, no formal political structure uniting these three groups. See Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man and Siksika Bands," 3.
  12. Barry Gough (ed.), *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799–1814*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1992), 376–77. Henry's journal provides extensive information about Old Swan. Henry was a North-West Company (NWC) trader who lived along the North Saskatchewan River between 1808–1810. See Barry Gough, "Alexander Henry" in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, 1801–1820 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 418.
  13. See Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean?: Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, 214–16. As Binnema shows, the "Rocky mountains" in Fidler's drawing of the map was probably in fact the *mistakis*, the front-range hills most noticeable from the plains.
  14. *Ibid.*, 216–17. Binnema, however, never raises the possibility that the map was a piece of propaganda about the military superiority of the Blackfoot: it may have been that Old Swan was trying to impress Fidler with the map and its meaning.
  15. HBCA B.60/a/6, April 7, 1807.
  16. HBCA B.60/c/1, District Report, 1815.
  17. *Ibid.*
  18. *Ibid.*
  19. HBCA B.60/a/11, October 12, 1812.
  20. One exception was a journey Bird took on horse back in 1812 to the new Factory site—although even this trip was along the riverbank. See HBCA B.60/a/11, October 9, 1812.
  21. HBCA B.60/a/13, October 20, 1814.
  22. HBCA B.60/a/9, February 18, 1811.
  23. Bird, "Sept. 25 1799," in Alice Johnson (ed.), *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence 1799–1802* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1967), 210–11.
  24. *Ibid.*, 211.
  25. Bird to McNab, HBCA B.60/a/7, August 8, 1808.
  26. HBCA B.60/a/9, July 30, 1811.
  27. HBCA B.60/a/12, October 15, 1813.
  28. HBCA B.60/a/12, February 28, 1814.
  29. HBCA B.60/c/1, District Report 1815.
  30. Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean?," 214.
  31. *Ibid.*, 215–18.
  32. For movements in the early fall see Peter Fidler, "September 27 1801," in *Saskatchewan Journals*, 293. See also Gough, *Journal of Alexander Henry*, 366. For record of a fall war-trip see Fidler, "November 1, 1800," *Saskatchewan Journals*, 274. For movement to plains for winter buffalo hunts see Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), chapter 2.
  33. For the difficulty of using horses see HBCA B.60/a/9, January 31, 1811.
  34. Bird to Captain MacDonald, HBCA B.60/a/1, February 28, 1814.
  35. See Gough, *Journal of Alexander Henry*, 381 and 358. See also Bird's reaction to Old Swan as a peace-maker between Cree and Siksika: HBCA B.60/a/6, April 7, 1807; and HBCA B.60/a/13, October 17, 1814.
  36. HBCA B.60/a/10, February 17, 1812; HBCA B.60/a/11, December 29, 1813; HBCA B.60/a/12, September 28, 1814.
  37. HBCA B.60/a/12.
  38. HBCA B.60/c/1, District Report 1815.
  39. *Ibid.* For another discussion of the gardens see HBCA B.60/a/10, October 18, 1811.
  40. HBCA B.60/c/1, District Report 1815. Bird's perception of the space as a cornucopia characterizes what may have become the HBC's approach to land and resources at Edmonton later in the nineteenth century. See Terence O'Rierson, "Straddling the 'Great Transformation': The Hudson's Bay Company in Edmonton during the Transition from the Commons to Private Property, 1854–1882," *Prairie Forum* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1–26.

41. See *Saskatchewan Journals*, 272, 277, 286.
42. Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 170.
43. See Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals*, Appendix A. The Made Beaver (MB) was used to describe the value of furs and trade goods in the North West. The Made Beaver was equal in value to one prime beaver skin.
44. Two important works that emphasize economic/material motivations are Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman, "Give Us Good Measure," and Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*.
45. Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 73–75.
46. A list of trade items in 1813 also includes blankets, cloth, beads and hatchets. See HBCA.60/z/1. For reference to these as "necessities" see B.60/a/6, April 7, 1807.
47. Fidler, "September 27, 1801," *Saskatchewan Journals*, 293.
48. Fidler, "November 9, 1801," *Saskatchewan Journals*, 300.
49. Fidler, "November 15, 1801," *Saskatchewan Journals*, 300–301.
50. HBCA B.60/a/6, April 7, 1807.
51. See the initial letter from Fidler to Edmonton House in December 1800 asking for supplies: Fidler asks for "cloth for Chiefs coats and other things to rig the chiefs..." These may not have been the actual materials used to make Old Swan's coat, but it reveals that chiefs were "rigged" with more than just "a coat." Old Swan was actually "rigged" with the coat in April 1802. See Fidler, "December 2, 1800" and "April 3, 1802," *Saskatchewan Journals*, 278 and 320.
52. HBCA B.60/c/1, District Report, 1815.
53. HBCA B.60/a/12, November 24, 1813.
54. HBCA B.60/a/12, December 14, 1813.
55. HBCA B.60/a/13, October 17, 1814.
56. HBCA B.60/a/7, December 20, 1807.
57. HBCA B.60/a/12, October 20, 1813.
58. HBCA B.60/a/9, January 3, 1810.
59. HBCA B.60/a/12, March 21, 1814.
60. It is difficult to say where Bird placed people of mixed descent (including his own sons) as he never comments directly on this. However, in 1811 Jimmy "Jock" Bird (James's son) is labelled as a "native" in Edmonton House documents. See "Men's Debts," Edmonton House Account Books, HBCA B.60/d/2a 1811.
61. HBCA B.60/a/7, October 19, 1808. This was in response to Stoney horse raiding and conflict between the Stoney and traders to the east.
62. HBCA B.60/a/11, April 11, 1813. See also Bird's subsequent decision to post guards at the fort.
63. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; New York: Random House, 1994), 1–15. Said's seminal work gives an explanation of what might be the knowledge/power paradigm in the colonial context and how "race" and racialization are associated with this process. See also C.A. Bayly's discussion of this process in the global context of the Empire. Bayly points to the 1820s as the time after which the Indigenous people in the Empire were, in Bayly's words, "invented." C.A. Bayly, "The British and Indigenous peoples, 1760–1860: Power, perception and identity," in Martin Daunton and Richard Halpern (eds.), *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous People 1600–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 21–33.
64. HBCA B.60/c/1, District Report, 1815.
65. Gough, *Journal of Alexander Henry*, 401.
66. *Ibid.*, 421
67. *Ibid.* 421–22
68. *Ibid.*, 379.
69. To see why I've included the publisher's (potential) role in this transmission process see I.S. Maclaren, "Paul Kane and the Authorship of Wanderings of an Artist," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, 225–48.
70. See Ella Clark, *Indian Legends: From the Northern Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 235. See also Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man and Siksika Bands," 12.
71. For the theoretical ideas employed here see Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and Historical Imagination* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1992), 5.
72. Gough, *Journal of Alexander Henry*, 379.
73. C.A. Bayly, "The British and Indigenous Peoples, 1760–1860," 33.
74. HBCA B.60/a/1B, October 17, 1814.
75. Gough, *Journal of Alexander Henry*, 380.
76. Foster, "James Bird," 20.



77. Bird's leave to England in 1822 seems to be his first time east of Hudson Bay since arriving in Rupert's Land. See Johnson, "Introduction," in *Saskatchewan Journals*, passim.
78. HBCA B.60/f/I, "List of Servants [1815]."
79. See Johnson, "Introduction," *Saskatchewan Journals*, xcvi. Included here is a long list of books owned by James Bird.
80. William Tomison to Bird, April 4, 1801, quoted in Johnson, "Introduction," *Saskatchewan Journals*, lxxxiii.
81. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 9.
82. Bird to Mr. Prudens, HBCA B.60/a/7, 14 December 1807. In another instance, Bird explains why he is choosing to ignore the rules about not taking in wolf skins. See HBCA B.60/a/12, October 8, 1813.
83. Examples of how this tension informed Bird's life include his endorsement and practice of interracial marriage, an act technically outlawed by the HBC. Also, Bird did not always follow the Company protocol for discipline and social control. See Elizabeth Burly, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in The Hudson's Bay Company, 1770–1879* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1997), 147.
84. For discussion of the "great transformation" of Western Canada see Irene Spry, "The Great Transformation: The Disappearance of the Commons in Western Canada," in R.A. Allen (ed.), *Man and Nature on the Prairies* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1976), 21–45.